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SUBJECT: MOVEMENTS EXPECT GOS RETALIATION IN DARFUR

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Darfur representatives of Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi (SLA/MM) expect Government of Sudan (GoS) to retaliate against Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) positions in Darfur for JEM having exposed the GoS' military weakness, particularly by allegedly killing officers at the Wadi Sayedna military base. Airports in the three main Darfur cities were closed until 1500 hours May 13, after the GoS claimed to have intercepted communications indicating that the governments of Chad and Libya would attempt to airlift JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim from Sudan. A prominent El Fasher representative of the Popular Congress Party speculated that JEM's brazen attack would buy a reprieve for Darfurians after weeks of attacks, with further assaults against Khartoum if GoS officials do not agree to talks with the movements. Conversations with JEM imply that field commanders will be back in JEM's Jebel Moun stronghold by May 14, and JEM reps continue to insist that their movement is in a "good position." END SUMMARY.

SLA/MM UNSURPRISED AND IMPRESSED BY JEM ATTACK

¶2. (SBU) In a May 13 meeting, El Fasher and Khor Abeche representatives of SLA/MM told FieldOff that it was only a matter of time before JEM launched an attack on Khartoum, especially in the wake of attacks by Chadian rebels in N'djamena earlier in the year. With Chadian President Deby firmly in power, largely due to JEM support, the time was right for the GoC to take the offensive by using JEM to destabilize the GoS, as that regime had used Chadian rebels to destabilize the GoC.

¶3. (SBU) Like other Darfur movements, SLA/MM reps were impressed by JEM's ability to strike at the heart of the GoS in its first try, something that they claimed is leading to a "superiority complex" among arrogant JEM members. One rep relayed a recent sentiment among Darfurians that the SLA first had to take El Fasher (overrunning the airport in 2004) before moving onwards and upwards to Khartoum, whereas Khalil went straight to Khartoum in his first attempt, skipping the Darfur step. Both reps believed that Khalil had never intended to take control of Khartoum in this first go, since JEM lacked the support of the Arab regime there and of the three main Nile Valley Arab tribes, all necessary for a successful coup attempt. If Khalil is to retain control of Khartoum, the reps said, "he is going to need Sudan Armed Forces' and militias' complicity," implying that JEM would have to infiltrate military ranks and exploit GoS contacts, as it is already assumed to be doing.

¶4. (SBU) Reps agreed with FieldOff's speculation that JEM might actually be doing the process in reverse, going for Khartoum as a diversion, while concentrating efforts on overrunning Darfur or Kordofan next [NOTE: UNAMID leadership, including the Force Commander, Deputy Force Commander and Chief of Staff all consider this to be the case. The Force Commander also theorizes that the GoS consciously let JEM get as close as it did in order to expose and purge its own military ranks and security organs of potential

JEM infiltrators and sympathizers. END NOTE]. JEM reps indicated to FieldOff on May 13 that JEM field commanders would be back in Jebel Moun by May 14, likely in preparation for a forthcoming attack in West Darfur.

¶5. (SBU) Both reps consider the JEM attack a success, as it conveyed the message to the GoS that Darfuris are able to threaten Khartoum and that the GoS needs to take the peace process more seriously. FieldOff noted the inherent contradiction in JEM's using military means to advance the prospects for negotiation, but the rebel reps asserted that military force is the only way to get the Government's attention. JEM's success in doing so, they insisted, empowers other rebel movements to follow JEM's lead: not by joining JEM's ranks, but rather by consolidating under a common umbrella (the Minni reps thought it would be under SLA), coordinating (but not joining) with JEM, and then confronting the GoS. SLA/MM reps noted that some SLA non-signatory movements and commanders had expressed their support for JEM after the May 9-10 attacks, pointing out that in times like these, "ideologies are flexible." The reps expressed concern that defections from SLA/MM's own ranks to JEM would increase after JEM's "success." The reps doubted that JEM is actually against other movements, as it has claimed in the press, but rather against the proliferation of movements, which would complicate prospects for peace talks.

PCP: FORCE MUST BE DEFEATED BY FORCE

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¶6. (SBU) In a separate May 13 meeting, a prominent Popular Congress Party (PCP) representative in El Fasher agreed that JEM had not aimed to take the capital with its brazen offensive. Instead, he reasoned, Khalil wanted to send the message that he is perfectly capable of taking the Darfur fight to the GoS' own backyard, and is

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no longer content for Darfuran suffering to remain hidden in the desert. The PCP rep seemed delighted by the results of the attack and reveled in recounting a 2004 incident, during which he explained he had run into a visiting GoS official after a bombing attack in Darfur. The PCP rep said he had not yet washed his own hands from burying relatives when the GoS official smugly told him that no one in Khartoum was affected by the death and destruction in Darfur. "Maybe now they are affected!" the PCP rep roared. Although his party officially disavowed violence, he respected Khalil's efforts to bring about change in a "brutal" regime, stating bluntly, "Force must be defeated by force." JEM leader Ibrahim was once the protégé of PCP leader Hassan al-Turabi.

EXPECT GOS RETALIATION IN DARFUR

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¶7. (SBU) Emboldened JEM reps told FieldOff the evening of May 12 that JEM planned to "attack everywhere in Darfur," and SLA/MM reps did not discount this possibility, particularly in West Darfur, where they suspect the GoS would round up militias and target JEM areas in retaliation for JEM's killing of several officers at the GoS military base Wadi Sayedna, an especially humiliating defeat for the GoS. Airports in the three main Darfur cities were closed after the GoS claimed to have intercepted communications between Chad, Libya and JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim indicating the two governments would attempt to airlift Khalil from Sudan. They doubted that JEM would launch significant attacks in either El Geneina or El Fasher, as that would result in civilian casualties/collateral damage for which JEM would prefer to see the GoS take the blame.

¶8. (SBU) In addition to likely aerial strikes, SLA/MM reps predicted that GoS detention of alleged JEM supporters would continue. The reps noted that they had a list of approximately 18 Fur and Zaghawas (the tribe to which Deby, Minni and Khalil all belong) who had been arrested in Khartoum as a result of the GoS crackdown after the JEM attack (actually, many more were arrested). They noted that Popular Congress Party leader and closet JEM supporter Hassan al-Turabi, who was arrested in Khartoum on May 12, was released only "because he is Arab." One of the reps further explained that it is not politically advantageous for President Bashir to detain Turabi because Bashir needs "as much political support as he can get right now" and accordingly does not want to be seen as cracking down even

on opposition parties. Therefore, they speculated that the GoS will renew its "honeymoon" with Minni in the coming days [NOTE: Addressing rumors of collaboration between Turabi and Khalil, the PCP rep denied that the two had spoken "in recent memory." He was less adamant when asked about more general ties between the two, refusing to confirm or deny links between his party and JEM. END NOTE].

¶9. (SBU) The SLA reps also speculated that the GoS propaganda campaign would continue as part of its effort to discredit Darfuris and minimize the effects of JEM's offensive. They noted that television footage of the Khartoum events featured those taken prisoner in the aftermath of the JEM attack as "Africans," in order to play to an allegedly racist Khartoum-Arab audience that would never deem these "black" prisoners, who came from the field and who could not speak Arabic (only Zaghawa in some cases), capable of leading the Sudanese government. The reps said the GoS similarly exploits the Chadian elements it has captured by parading them in front of TV cameras to show that JEM's ties are closer to Chad than to Sudan, as it had to resort to using foreign fighters in its push on Khartoum.

CHAD STILL "OWES" GOS

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¶10. (SBU) The PCP rep was not convinced that any group, GoS or rebel, would attack targets in Darfur. Every Darfuri knows that the GoS directly engaged in and supported three separate attacks on the Chadian capital, he said. Even if Chad did assist with the attack on Khartoum, GoC still "owed" the GoS two further incursions before the score would be settled. In its weakened state, he reasoned, the GoS would not risk clashing with Chad, which is still supporting and supported by JEM efforts. As such, Darfurians would benefit from a badly needed, although possibly brief, respite. The PCP rep believed that JEM would wait to see if its assault would bring the GoS to the negotiating table, and if not, it would resume attacks on the capital rather than in Darfur.

COMMENT

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¶11. (SBU) Darfuri conspiracy theories abound in the absence of concrete, credible information about JEM's next move. That the JEM offensive could have the unintended consequence of doing what myriad mediators could not - unite the rebels - is enticing, but not likely to extend beyond the imaginary realm. It is one thing to

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consolidate under a common umbrella on the battlefield, but quite another to do so on issues of power -- and wealth-shQg. The idea the movements have about the power of JEM's offensive to force the GoS to the negotiating table seems illogical, as the Government would be loathe to talk peace while still licking its war wounds. There is little doubt that the Khartoum regime will respond to JEM and Chad. The international community can do much to deter this confrontation from visiting even more misery on the long suffering people of Darfur and Eastern Chad in a crisis between two unsavory regimes and their equally dubious surrogates. END COMMENT.

FERNANDEZ